

**Lexington Public Schools
School Committee Meeting – December 14, 2004
Bowman Elementary School**

Members present were Tom Griffiths, Scott Burson, Helen Cohen, Olga Gutttag, Tom Diaz, Student Representative Janette Ekanem and Interim Superintendent William Hurley.

Tom Griffiths called the meeting to order at 7:40 p.m.

Public Comment

Vito LaMura, President of the Lexington Education Association, introduced Sandy DiMartino, the LHS representative for the LEA board. Ms. DiMartino presented the School Committee with a petition signed by 154 high school faculty and another 228 faculty members from other schools in support of the foreign language grievance that was filed. She read the petition to the School Committee expressing her dismay and asked the School Committee for a timely and respectful resolution of these matters with the LEA.

Phyllis Ferlinz, a teacher in Lexington for the past 44 years, addressed the School Committee and said she is saddened and disheartened to think that the administration of the Lexington educational leaders would go against and not honor their agreement.

Vaag Mosca, 30 year veteran of the Lexington school system and a resident of Lexington, said the LEA came to an agreement with the School Committee that they felt good about and asked that they continue to work in that light and work with the teachers so as not to go to binding arbitration.

Tom Griffiths agreed with Mr. Mosca but said he would like to see this matter resolved with binding arbitration.

Mr. Hurley invited all staff to stay for the budget presentation tonight as it may give them a better understanding about the issues we are facing both as a community and as a school district.

Superintendent's Report

Bowman Elementary School – Welcome from Principal Malcolm Astley

Mr. Hurley introduced Malcolm Astley, who has been with the Lexington School Department for 10 years. Mr. Astley discussed Bowman's goals this year. One of Bowman's goals is to promote the open circle program, which was first launched at Fiske several years ago. This program is to help children develop important social skills. Bowman is also maintaining work in the Collins Writing Program is another goal, which

they are blending with the Scott Forseman Program. Another goal involves trying to work on the achievement gap.

Tom Diaz asked Mr. Astley to shed light on the programs and pilots for highly educated students. Mr. Astley said he is working on staff understanding and trying to raise the level of dialog in classes to make sure it is fitting the intelligence needs of students.

Presentation of M.A.S.S. Certificates of Academic Excellence

Superintendent Hurley presented two high school students, Elise Tyson and Alex Chang, with M.A.S.S. Certificates of Academic Excellence for their outstanding scholarship and community involvement.

Superintendent's FY06 Proposed Budget

Mr. Hurley presented a proposed FY06 budget of \$69,877,351, which is a 5.3% increase from last year. Major budget driving factors include obligation increases. These relate to Medicare tax and health benefit rates, contractual step increases, operation including utilities and equipment service/repair, Special Education placement/transportation as well as instructional substitutes. The second component relates to population growth and addition to staff. Mr. Hurley noted critical needs not included in this budget amount to approximately \$1,362,750.

Mr. Griffiths opened the meeting to discussion with School Committee members about the proposed budget.

Olga Gutttag thanked Mr. Hurley for preparing this budget as well as for answering all her questions. She asked where in the budget is there a line item that leaves room for salary negotiation. Mr. Hurley said there is money that can be allocated toward some type of settlement agreement but it is fractional, somewhat less than 1%.

Tom Diaz noted there is a significant percentage increase in maintenance/operations and would like more detail. Susan Bottan stated that the maintenance/operations increases from \$3.1 million to \$3.9 million relate to utilities, facility repairs, and equipment repairs.

Scott Burson noted there was no mention of full-day kindergarten and asked what Mr. Hurley's long-range view is on this. Mr. Hurley said educationally he is in full support of full-day kindergarten but to provide such the state would need to provide more funds.

Helen Cohen asked about the \$40,000 necessary for the peer-mentoring program. Kelly McCausland said a LEF grant is supporting \$32,000 towards this program. Ms. Cohen feels the mentoring of new teachers is going to be extremely important and wishes we could pay for this out of the budget for all our new teachers.

Tom Griffiths inquired about the salary increments in the budget. The School Committee is going to be negotiating and want to be clear about how much they need to allocate. It is important to note that where this budget sits there is likely to be an additional burden placed on the budget as to negotiations with teachers and salaries. There is a possibility that we may need more money to complete our negotiations. Mr. Hurley said the proposed budget does not include an exact amount but wanted to let the School Committee know how much they may possibly have to add to the proposed budget amount.

Mr. Griffiths also noted the town will be emphasizing its triple A rating. Given that a 1% increase across the board is about \$400,000, it seems we will have to go forward with a \$2 million priority list, which Mr. Hurley said we could have by the first School Committee meeting in January. Mr. Griffiths commented that the utility increases are amazing and unfortunately looks like they are going to get worse.

Olga Gutttag stated she is not happy to see that we might have to go over the maximum recommended class size in our elementary schools and hopes that does not become the case. The smaller the class size the better the education but looking at staffing levels and the average numbers, we are somewhat below the School Committee preferred levels in elementary schools. She suggested multi-grade grouping as a solution, which would keep elementary class size at the School Committee preferred ratio while reducing the total number of elementary teachers. It is clear to her that we need to increase staff at the high school and middle schools. Looking at the budget, Ms. Gutttag said she is also concerned about cutting programs and does not want to go back to again eliminating entire programs.

Scott Burson is skeptical that there is \$2 million in cuts in this budget and stated if the resources are not there, we will have to rethink what we need to do.

Mr. Diaz expressed surprise that newly conservative revenue projections, stimulated by concern about the Moody's AAA rating, were causing us to consider cutting services this year.

Olga Gutttag suggested looking at projections for the next several years to see how the override would hold us through. Last year we did not budget for salary increases. Employees work very hard and they are entitled to good pay. Although we cannot afford to be the best any more, we still need to be competitive.

Mr. Burson said if we want to budget for salary increases, we have to negotiate first and then put the result in the budget. Tom Diaz agreed and said that, before we negotiate, we should not set expectations in these meetings about percentage increases, because we bargain in good faith with the employees.

Olga Gutttag asked where we stood in regard to negotiating benefits. Mr. Griffiths said these issues need to be bargained for at the same time as part of the same overall package. We need to sit down and consider everything at once. Benefits are bargained for centrally and salaries by the School Committee and Superintendent. Mr. Burson said it might be more important to settle salaries first.

Mr. LaMura said the LEA is ready to negotiate at any time.

Olga Gutttag is concerned about having a \$1.5 to \$2 million deficit.

The School Committee opens the meeting for public comments.

Jane Pagett, Town Meeting member, said it is one thing to talk about bargaining in good faith and getting together with employees, union representatives, and town officials to bargain together in terms of the needs of the overall organization, but she is appalled at those teachers who came to hold a sign but didn't want to stay to learn about the fiscal problems in the system they work in.

Deborah Strod, Town Meeting member, said they are seeking comparatives from other towns.

Capital Expenditures Recommendations

Dana Ham presented the School Committee with a five-year capital plan that covers the fiscal years 2006-2010. The plan will help in maintaining the existing buildings. All issues that were outlined are considered priorities to maintain the system but with the understanding that the buildings can change over time and these priorities may change as other needs arise.

Charles Lamb, liaison for the capital expenditures committee, said they do not expect to see a five-year plan.

Olga Gutttag said she is happy to see the Clarke and Diamond heating controls budgeted for next year. As for system wide equipment, she inquired if there is an opportunity to collaborate with the town side and DPW. She is concerned about having expensive equipment that only gets used once a month and suggested doing system-wide chores or working with the town on sharing equipment.

Dana Ham said the school department is looking at different options. They are working on a program to look at how we actually do business as far as maintenance and custodians. Mr. Ham is working with someone on alternative cleaning methods and should have more information by the end of January.

On the school monitoring equipment request, Ms. Guttag commented that having the corridors monitored inside the school, as well as the outside, not only provides protection of assets but also allows for better monitoring inside the school.

Tom Griffiths questioned what the \$505,000 worth of equipment would purchase. Dana Ham gave the School Committee a list of equipment that would be purchased for each school. He also noted that the only equipment that can be shared is lawn mowers. All other equipment is building-based.

Mr. Ham reiterated that the heating rebate is 50% but will double-check this with Nstar. He also advised that he would work with the PBC on a formal needs assessment for the Central Office administration building.

Tom Diaz said the School Committee needed to set a direction as to how they house the central office. He suggested putting this on a future School Committee agenda. Ms. Guttag agreed that the School Committee needed to make a decision on what the white house will become.

Mr. Ham noted the PBC has asked that the School Committee not make a decision if the current administration building space can be used until we have a needs assessment completed. It is Mr. Hurley's opinion that if the current central office building meets the space needs assessment then it would behoove the School Committee to maintain that building as the central office location.

It was noted there is a need for 10,000 square feet to house the central administration. Tom Griffiths inquired what the additional space would be used for. Mr. Ham stated that the special education office would be brought back as well as other departments. There will be the need to have the building made handicap accessible with additional bathrooms, conference space and an elevator.

George Burnell, member of the capital expenditures committee, commented that all the work that has been done so far indicates that the current building can accommodate 10,000 square feet and with the general figure of \$2.5 million, the school administration will have a new building.

Mr. Griffiths noted that the School Committee should endorse the design phase. Before doing so and agreeing to keep the central office in its current location, they asked if there were any other locations in the center of town that would accommodate the needs. Mr. Burnell said space is hard to come by. If that building is going to stay, the town has to spend the money to restore it regardless of what it's used for. Mr. Burnell feels if the money has to be spent to keep the building, the school department should take advantage. Scott Burson confirmed that there is not a lot of land or building opportunities in town.

Dawn McKenna, Selectman, fully supports dealing with the central office building. She disagrees that there is no other site available. The space needs committee that did the work in 2000 recommended the central office administration to add a wing onto the town office building but they did not get an estimate for this. She did indicate that the money they are talking about to renovate the existing central office is reasonable. Helen Cohen said the matter of the central office administration building is an urgent need and should not be put off.

Tom Griffiths believes it is essential to move forward with this and wants the School Committee on record one way or the other. Tom Diaz suggested putting this on the agenda for the December 21st meeting. That way the School Committee will have more information to make an informed decision.

Charles Lamb asked if the technology piece is going to be forthcoming or is it off for this year pending receipt of the technology report. Tom Diaz said the technology piece would be forthcoming this year.

The School Committee would like to get more information from Mr. Ham approving the capital budget

Superintendent Search Subcommittee Update

Helen Cohen reported that half the search committee has been interviewing eight semi-final candidates and should arrive at a decision about which finalists they will recommend to the School Committee by the end of this week. This information will not be available to the public as some of the candidates still require confidentiality to make the announcement to their current school system. We will announce the finalists as soon as we can.

Members' Reports/Members' Concerns

Olga Guttag noted the town manger search committee meetings in January are slated for the same nights as the superintendent search. Ms. McKenna said this is not an issue. The School Committee should let her office know and they can adjust the town manager interviews around that.

Helen Cohen attended a meeting of the Youth Services Council today.

Mr. Hurley said he would send a memo out to staff that relates to the issues of the State Ethics Commission. The topic relates to staff not providing extra tutorial services to students for a fee. This is a reminder to all staff that they are not to use any school facility to conduct provide tutoring.

Tom Griffiths said at the high school he noticed in the practice rooms there were teachers teaching both high school students and, in one instance, a non-high school student. Mr. Hurley said if it is one of our staff and being paid for this, it should not be happening. Mr. Griffiths also inquired about Dick Michelson's request on the school calendar. Mr. Hurley said if it does not alter the other calendar dates then he is willing to provide that option.

Approval of the November 16th minutes is being deferred until the December 21st School Committee meeting.

A motion was made at 10:18 p.m. to go into Executive Session for purposes of discussing pending litigation and not return to public session. (Burson – Cohen; roll call vote 5-0 unanimous)

Submitted by,

Lisa McGuire

cc: William Hurley
Tom Griffiths
Scott Burson
Olga Gutttag
Helen Cohen
Tom Diaz